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Coroner concerned by 'elusive' nature of MI5

By Barry McCaffrey and William Graham

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Northern Ireland's most senior coroner yesterday admitted to becoming "increasingly vexed" at his inability to contact the top secret MI5 organisation.

Coroner John Leckey expressed a growing irritation at the elusive nature of the intelligence agency's new role in Northern Ireland.

Last December an inquest into the RUC shooting of IRA man Pearse

Jordan in 1992 was told that MI5 had taken over responsibility for assessing the threat risk to 14 police officers called to give evidence at the hearing.

Mr Leckey was assured the threat assessments would be completed within weeks but three months on the coroner has voiced frustration that he has still heard nothing from MI5.

Mr Leckey expressed irritation that he could not avail of the "luxury of picking up the telephone" to quiz MI5 chiefs over their failure to provide the court with the threat assessments.

PSNI barrister Bernard McCloskey said he would contact "certain quarters" to address the concerns.

When Mr Leckey questioned whether he will be allowed to share correspondence received from MI5 with the Jordan family's legal representative, Mr McCluskey assured the coroner that the "suggestive limitation of dissemination" would be explored in due course.

In an unusual move the coroner's own legal representative, Nicholas Hanna QC, raised concerns over the PSNI's apparent inability to provide the Jordan family's legal team with proper disclosure of intelligence material.

Yesterday's hearing was told that the Jordan family's legal team had still to receive substantial amounts of intelligence documents from the PSNI.

Missing documents include a statement made by the police officer who shot Mr Jordan, police transmissions before the shooting and notes of a meeting between former Special Branch chief Bill Lowry and the officers involved in the shooting.

More than 35 pages of the investigating officer's original 50-page report into the shooting have also been withheld.

However the Jordan family's barrister Karen Quinlivan BL, acting for Madden & Finucane solicitors, complained that even the documents they have received from the PSNI were completely unintelligible, as practically every name was blacked out.

Ms Quinlivan said that even non-sensitive material, which had originally included the names of witnesses, had subsequently been blacked out by the PSNI.

"There is no way of cross referencing to other documents – they are unintelligible and that renders them useless," she said.

"It makes absolutely no sense and shows a backward step by the PSNI in relation to disclosure."


The coroner's barrister Nicholas Hanna claimed the PSNI's failure to supply the Jordan family with proper disclosure had turned the proceedings into a "marathon".

"We need some clarity here. It's not satisfactory that some names were initially unredacted and now appear redacted," he said.

Mr McCluskey said the PSNI was continuing to work on disclosure issues, but that if agreement could not be reached with the Jordan family, it may ultimately be a matter for the High Court to resolve.

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